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AUTHOR Knapp, Samuel; Edmiston, Andrew J.
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ABSTRACT

Similar to other mental health agencies, university counseling centers are being asked to document the quantity and quality of their work. To evaluate the University Counseling Service (UCS) at Lehigh University a 6-year study was conducted to assess utilization patterns (using 2 years of intake information), student concerns (using the Counseling Services Assessment Blank (CSAB),) and student satisfaction with services (using a Likert scale rating form). An analysis of the results showed that women and arts and science students sought counseling more frequently than any other group. The self-reported areas of concern among clients varied according to sex and class. Women were more likely to seek personal counseling. Freshmen and sophomores were more likely to request vocational or educational counseling. The clients' self-reported satisfaction with counseling did not vary according to class or sex, but clients reported greater satisfaction with personal counseling than with vocational or educational counseling. Future research should focus on specific elements which contribute to client satisfaction, e.g., client attitudes, client diagnosis, counselor/client sex pairing, or treatment procedures. (Author/BL)

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An Evaluation of a University Counseling Service

Samuel Knapp
The Handler Center
Millersburg, Pa.
Andrew J. Edmiston
University Counseling Service
Lehigh University

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Running Head: Evaluation

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Abstract

This article reports the utilization patterns and client evaluations of the University Counseling Service of Lehigh University. Consistent with the data from other universities, women and Arts and Science students more frequently sought counseling. Furthermore, the self-reported areas of concern among clients varied according to sex and class. Women were more likely to seek personal counseling. Freshmen and sophomores were more likely to request vocational or educational counseling. Finally, the clients' self-report of satisfaction with counseling did not vary according to class or sex, but clients reported greater satisfaction with personal counseling than with vocational or educational counseling.

An Evaluation of a University Counseling Service

Similar to other mental health agencies, university counseling centers are being asked to document the quantity and quality of their work. This article reports on the client evaluations of the University Counseling Service (UCS) at Lehigh University. Specific issues addressed are: Who uses the UCS? How do students who use the UCS define their areas of concern? How do students rate their satisfaction with the counseling they receive?

Lehigh is an independent, non-denominational, coeducational university. Its students are a largely homogeneous group of academically high achieving students who mostly come from eastern Pennsylvania, New York, or New Jersey. Approximately 70 per cent of the students are male.

The Lehigh UCS has three full-time psychologists and, over the period of this study, has had six doctoral level graduate assistants. All the psychologists and the graduate assistants, except two, are male. The UCS is the primary source of career

and mental health counseling provided by the university.

Who Uses the UCS?

Data on the utilization patterns were obtained from the Annual Reports (Note 1; Note 2) of the UCS for two recent years which recorded the sex and college of each student using the UCS. This data was compared with the overall enrollment at Lehigh by sex and college for the same period. Only two years of data were used because the proportion of women students at Lehigh had been steadily increasing and had not stabilized until the last two years. As Table 1 shows, utilization of the UCS varied by sex and college.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Regardless of their college of enrollment, women used the UCS proportionately more than men. This data is consistent with studies from Cornell University (White & Ottens, 1979), the University of Cincinnati (Selig & Weiss, 1975; Wogan & Ambdur, 1974), and Fort Hayes State College (Boor, 1975) finding that women use counseling services more frequently than men.

These findings are open to different interpretations. One interpretation is that patterns of emotional disturbance may vary according to the individual's sex.

In their review of epidemiological studies of mental illnesses, Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1969) concluded that women have higher rates of neurosis, but men have higher rates of alcoholism and conduct disorders. Data at Lehigh are consistent with this interpretation. Although women had a greater usage of the counseling service, men had a greater frequency of property destruction, assaults, and offenses while under the influence of alcohol (Knapp & Edmiston, 1982).

But data on the higher usage of counseling services by women are open to other interpretations. Phillips and Segal (1969) claim that women do not have a greater prevalence of emotional disorders, but are more willing to admit to psychological discomfort. Another interpretation is that women, because of upbringing, attitudes, or experiences, have a greater propensity to seek counseling as a means to resolve life difficulties.

The UCS data also showed that students in the College of Arts and Sciences sought counseling more frequently than students in the Colleges of Business or Engineering. Comparison of this data with studies from other universities should be made

cautiously. Universities differ in the availability of majors or their categorization into colleges. Furthermore, colleges within universities may differ on the academic strengths of their students. For example, at Lehigh University, the College of Engineering has students with higher quantitative skills than the Colleges of Business or Arts and Science (Note 3). However, this pattern may not exist or may exist to a different degree at other universities. Nevertheless, data from Lehigh is consistent with data from Colorado State University (Bryer, 1972-1973), Fort Hayes State College (Boor, 1975), and Kansas State University at Manhattan (Downey & Sinnett, 1980), where humanities or social science students sought counseling more frequently than students in more technical fields. As with women, it is not clear if Arts and Science students have a greater prevalence of emotional distress, or if they more frequently use counseling as a vehicle to resolve their life problems.

What are the Students' Concerns?

The Counseling Services Assessment Blank (CSAB;

Hurst, Weigel, Thatcher, & Nyman, 1969) was used to identify student concerns. The CSAB has three parts. In the first part the students recorded basic demographic information. In the second part the students identified their primary area of concern as either vocational, educational, or personal. Hurst et al. (1969) and Weigel, Cochenour, and Russell (1967) found that clients and counselors have a high rate of agreement on the primary area of concern. The last part of the CSAB, which is described in the following section, asks students to rate their satisfaction with counseling.

For the first five years of the study, the CSAB was sent to clients who conferred with the UCS staff from September to March of that academic year. For the last year of the study the CSAB was sent to clients who conferred with the UCS staff at any time during the academic year. Students who did not respond to the first mailing were sent up to two follow-up letters. The rate of completed returns for the CSAB questionnaires ranged from 68 to 76 per cent. Over the six years reported in this section, 1214 student responded to the CSAB.

A comparison of CSAB respondents with data from the UCS Annual Report showed a high similarity between the demographic features of the two groups. This suggests that the CSAB clients constituted a representative sample of UCS clients.

Self-identified areas of concern varied according to class and sex. Proportionately more freshmen and sophomores requested counseling for vocational or educational concerns, X^2 (9) = 28.8, $p < .001$. This trend was expected because freshmen and sophomores are less likely to have chosen their major or crystalized their career plans.

Regardless of their class or college, women more frequently identified personal counseling as their primary area of concern X^2 (3) = 14.1, $p < .005$. This finding is consistent with a study from the University of Maryland (Collins & Sedlacek, 1974), where counselors rated women students as more likely to request personal counseling.

How do Students Rate Counseling?

The third part of the CSAB asked students to rate their satisfaction with various dimensions of counseling on a five point Likert scale. A score

of one indicated that the dimension of counseling was not helpful, while a score of five indicated that the dimension of counseling was very helpful. Davidshofer, Borman, & Weigel (1977) found this procedure to have adequate test-retest reliability for assessing satisfaction with counseling. However, the various items measuring dimensions of counseling had such high correlations that it appeared that they measured the same quality. The authors selected the item considered most representative of client satisfaction with counseling: "How would you rate your overall individual counseling experience?" One limitation of the CSAB is that it allowed only this gross measure of client satisfaction.

Students reported high satisfaction with counseling over the six year period reported in this section. Their ratings averaged 3.95 on the 5 point scale. These ratings are higher than the overall ratings of 3.88 which were reported by counseling services at institutions of similar size and academic status as Lehigh (Note 4).

The data was analyzed by a 2 X 3 X 4 (sex by areas of concern by college) analysis of variance.

Only a significant main effect for area of concern was found, $F(2, 1144) = 5.73$, $p < .005$. As Table 2 shows, students who underwent personal counseling reported higher satisfaction than those who experienced vocational or educational counseling.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

This finding was expected because it was believed that clients tend to invest more in personal counseling. They usually see their counselors for several sessions, discuss sensitive personal matters, and develop close emotional bonds with their counselor. In contrast, vocational or educational counseling seldom exceeds two sessions and does not usually have the degree of emotional valence found in personal counseling.

Summary

The results reported here lend support to previous themes noted in the counseling literature. Women and Arts and Science students sought counseling with greater frequency than other students. Also, women in particular were likely to seek personal counseling with greater frequency than men. In addition to corroborating past research,

it was found that students who underwent personal counseling expressed the highest levels of satisfaction.

One limitation of the CSAB is that it provides only a global measure of satisfaction. More research is needed into the elements which contribute to counseling satisfaction such as client attitudes, client diagnosis, counselor/client sex pairing, or the specific treatment procedures used. Additional research is needed.

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Table 1

Likelihood of Seeking Counseling in a Given Year[a]

College	Male	Female	Total
Arts and Sciences	1:14.7	1: 7.2	1:10.5
Business	1:21.2	1:14.8	1:18.9
Engineering	1:26.5	1:10.6	1:21.9
Total	1:21.1	1: 9.3	1:16.1

[a]The College of Education, which has few full-time students, was deleted from this table.